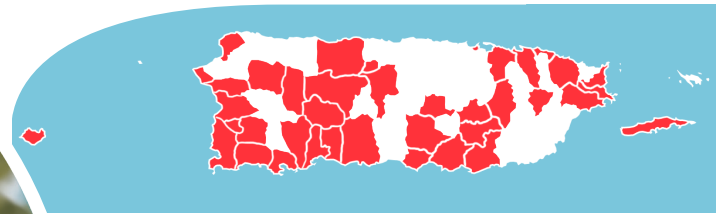


Yellow-Shouldered Blackbird

Agelaius xanthomus



Distribution

August. The nest's structure is cup-shaped, formed out of dry grass or algae, and lined with soft vegetable matter. These nests are built in trees, often in aggregation, to protect from predators. The incubation and nesting is done solely by the females. However, both parents work together to feed the hatchlings.

Habitat

The YSBL primarily nests in black mangroves (*Avicennia germinans*) and coconut palms (*Cocos nucifera*). It also nests in: West Indian locust (*Hymenaea courbaril*), red mangroves (*Rhizophora mangle*), Puerto Rico royal palm (*Roystonea borinquena*), and oxborn bucida (*Bucida buceras*), among others. The subspecies of Mona and Monito Islands make their nests in exposed cavities along the limestone cliffs. Before and after breeding and nesting season, the YSBL is frequently observed in mangroves and coastal scrub vegetation harboring American carob (*Prosopis pallida*), oxborn bucida (*Bucida buceras*) and guaiacwood (*Guaiacum officinale*).

Diet

The YSBL is omnivorous, feeding on both animal and vegetable matter alike. It may also be classified as an arboreal insectivore.

Distribution

The YSBL is an endemic species; that is to say, it only exists in Puerto Rico. In the past, this species was abundant throughout the Island, and has been documented in Adjuntas, Aguadilla, Arecibo, Añasco, Barranquitas, Cabo Rojo, Caguas, Carolina, Cataño, Cayey, Ceiba, Ciales, Cidra, Coamo, Fajardo, Florida, Guánica, Guayama, Guayanilla, Hormigueros, Juncos,

Familia: Icteridae
Orden: Passeriformes

Description

The yellow-shouldered blackbird (YSBL), also known as the mariquita de Puerto Rico or capitán, is a glossy black bird with bright yellow spots on the shoulder of each wing. Adults reach approximately 8 inches (20 centimeters) in length. Females are slightly smaller than males. The hatchlings are similar to the adults, with a duller black color.

Biological Information

This species is one of the nine species included in the *Agelaius* genus. There are two subspecies: *Agelaius xanthomus xanthomus*, known only on Puerto Rico's main island and on Vieques, and *Agelaius xanthomus monensis*, found only on the Mona and Monito Islands.

Reproduction

The YSBL breeding season lasts from April through

ENDANGERED

Lajas, Lares, Loíza, Mayagüez, Mona, Monito, Naguabo, Salinas, San Germán, San Juan, Utuado, Vieques, Peñuelas, Ponce, Rincón, Río Grande, San Sebastián, Santa Isabel and Yauco.

However, in the 1970's there was a very sharp decline in populations, with approximately 2,400 individuals left in the wild throughout the entire island. This amount was concentrated in three main populations: the yellow-shouldered blackbirds in southwest Puerto Rico (Boquerón Commonwealth Forest and La Parguera in Lajas), the group in southeast Puerto Rico (Former Roosevelt Roads Naval Station, RRNS), and the population in Mona and Monito islands. At present, the Boquerón Commonwealth Forest, the southern region of Puerto Rico (Salinas and Guayama) and Mona and Monito islands host the largest YSBL populations.

Threats

The major threats to the YSBL are:

- Destruction or modification of coastal forests for agricultural, residential, and tourism development.
- Predators:
 - Pearly-eyed thrasher (*Margarops fuscatus*)
 - American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)
 - Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)
 - Red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)
 - Small Indian mongoose (*Herpestes auropunctatus*)
 - Green iguana (*Iguana iguana*)
 - Rats (*Rattus rattus*)
 - Feral cat (*Felis catus*)
- Brood parasitism:
 - Shiny cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*) – This species performs brood parasitism; that is to say, it lays its eggs in the YSBL's nest, affecting the success rate of the blackbirds.
- Parasites that feed on chicks and adults, sometimes cause nest abandonment by the adults, increasing chick mortality:
 - Mites (*Ornithonyssus bursa* and *Androlaelaps casalis*)
 - Lice (*Philopterus agelaii*, *Machaerilaemus* sp., and *Myrsidea* sp.)
- Diseases:
 - Avian pox – This virus causes lesions that affect the vision, breathing and feeding processes of affected birds.

Conservation Measures

The yellow-shouldered blackbird was included in the Endangered Species list in 1976. Critical habitat for this species was designated in southwestern Puerto Rico, the municipality of San Germán, the former RRNS in the municipality of Ceiba, and Mona Island.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wrote the first Recovery Plan for the YSBL in 1983, with an updated version in 1996.

Within the current range of the YSBL there are at least four areas protected in perpetuity: La Parguera Natural Reserve, Boquerón Commonwealth Forest, Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge, and Boquerón Wildlife Refuge, and the wetland forest in the former RRNS.

The YSBL Recovery Project was established in 1984. Since its inception, the project has installed numerous artificial nesting structures for the species. These structures have the purpose of reducing nest predation and improving monitoring activities. During the 1985 breeding season, the project only had two nests in artificial structures. To date, that number has reached 255. Nearly 30 years after initiating this project, these nests have produced approximately 7,326 fledglings (young birds that have left the nest).

The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, prohibits the killing, harassing, trapping, purchasing or selling any species, as well as parts and products derived from the species.

References

Departamento de Recursos Naturales y Ambientales de Puerto Rico. http://www.drna.gobierno.pr/oficinas/arn/recursosvivos/negociado-de-pesca-y-vida-silvestre/division-de-recursos-terrestres-1/proyecto_mariquita/mariquita

Lewis, A. R., J. A. Cruz-Burgos, and F. J. Vilella. 1999. Movements, activity patterns and habitat use of the endangered Yellow-shouldered Blackbird (*Agelaius xanthomus xanthomus* [Sclater]). Final report submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Caribbean Field Office. 106 pp.

López-Ortiz, R., E. A. Ventosa-Febles, L. R. Reitsma, D. Hengstenberg, and W. Deluca. 2002. Increasing nest success in the yellow-shouldered blackbird (*Agelaius xanthomus*) in southwest Puerto Rico. Biological Conservation 108: 259-263.

ENDANGERED

López-Ortiz, R., E. A. Ventosa-Febles, K. R. Ramos-Álvarez, R. Medina-Miranda, and A. Cruz. 2006. Reduction in host use suggests host specificity in individual shiny cowbirds (*Molothrus bonariensis*). *Ornitología Neotropical* 17: 259-269.

López-Ortiz, R., E. A. Ventosa-Febles, K. R. Ramos-Álvarez, R. Medina-Miranda, and A. Dragoni. 2008. Nesting macro-habitat preferences of the Yellow-shouldered blackbird, *Agelaius xanthomus*. Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, unpublished report. 19 pp.

Medina-Miranda R., K. R. Ramos-Álvarez, and R. López-Ortiz. 2006. Annual Progress report. Puerto Rico Endangered Species Program ES 1-14, Study II. Yellow-shouldered Blackbird Recovery Actions. Report submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Caribbean Field Office. 5 pp. 25

Medina-Miranda R., K. R. Ramos-Álvarez, and R. López-Ortiz. 2007. Annual Progress report. Puerto Rico Endangered Species Program ES 1-14, Study II. Yellow-shouldered Blackbird Recovery Actions. Report submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Caribbean Field Office. 6 pp.

Medina-Miranda, R. 2008. Estrategias anti-parásitos en la mariquita de Puerto Rico (*Agelaius xanthomus*) y el canario de mangle (*Dendroica petechia*): dentro y fuera del área de manejo del tordo lustroso (*Molothrus bonariensis*). MS Thesis, Department of Biology, University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus. 41 pp.

Porrata-Doria, T. 2006. Genetic diversity of the Shiny Cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*): A mtDNA study on the variability within original and expanded range. MS Thesis, Department of Biology, University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus. 87 pp.

Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources. 2009. Designación de hábitat crítico natural para la mariquita de Puerto Rico (*Agelaius xanthomus*). 198 pp.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1996. Yellow-shouldered Blackbird (*Agelaius xanthomus*) Revised Recovery Plan. Atlanta, Georgia. 77 pp.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1996. Yellow-shouldered Blackbird (*Agelaius xanthomus*) Revised Recovery Plan. Atlanta, Georgia. 77 pp.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2011. Yellow-shouldered Blackbird (*Agelaius xanthomus*) 5-Yr Review and Summary. Atlanta, Georgia. 34 pp.

Vincenty, M. 2006. Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*) breeding biology and parasitism by the shiny cowbird (*Molothrus bonariensis*) in Boquerón, Puerto Rico. MS Thesis.

Additional Information

Caribbean Ecological Services Field Office

Address: PO Box 491, Boquerón, PR 00622

Telephone: 787-851-7297

Fax: 787-851-7440

Internet: www.fws.gov/caribbean



ENDANGERED